

# Nominating World Heritage Sites



## Can this property be a World Heritage Site?

Owners and friends of remarkable properties in the United States sometimes inquire about seeking World Heritage designation for them. This fact sheet provides basic information about the World Heritage program to help determine if that is a feasible goal, as well as important information about the procedures involved.



## The World Heritage Convention

This 1972 Treaty established the World Heritage List and the World Heritage Committee, which makes final decisions on all World Heritage nominations. The Committee is

composed of a rotating group of 21 countries elected from among the signatories to the Convention. The U.S. is not currently a member of the Committee.

The Committee's rules require that properties can only be nominated if they have been on their respective countries' Tentative List [see *below*] for at least a year.

## Qualifications for World Heritage Nomination

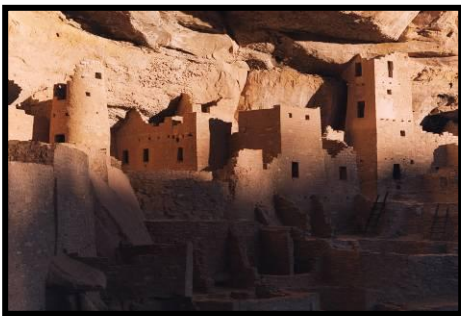
Under U.S. law, there are three prerequisites: 1) the property must be officially recognized as having national significance, e.g. a National Park, Monument, or National Historic Landmark, among others; 2) all property owners must provide written consent; 3) the owner and the Dept. of the Interior must agree that there is sufficient legal protection to ensure its long-term preservation.



Not all properties with national significance will be suitable for World Heritage nomination. Properties must be able to demonstrate influence or significance in a global context, or as it is called in the World Heritage Program, "outstanding universal value" (OUV). For example, the Statue of Liberty is important to Americans and is also internationally recognized for its design and engineering as well as its symbolic meanings. However, other places important to our national story will not necessarily have international influence or meaning. The U.S. government is familiar with how the World Heritage Committee evaluates OUV, and will nominate only properties that have a strong likelihood of success in that process.

World Heritage nominations must meet at least one of 10 criteria [see *links below*]. There are six cultural and four natural criteria. It is important to remember that the cultural criteria do not support listing for associative value alone, i.e. for places associated with important people or historical events.





Finally, areas with large numbers of property owners will have difficulties in meeting the requirement for owner consent. There should be evidence that all property owners are supportive before suggesting possible World Heritage sites.

### How the U.S. Nominates Properties

Under U.S. law, the Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks makes decisions on nominating U.S. properties from the U.S. Tentative List. He or she is advised by the National Park Service Office of International Affairs (NPS-OIA), which provides technical support, and by the Federal Interagency Panel on World Heritage, representing other federal agencies.



### The U.S. World Heritage Tentative List

There are 13 natural and cultural properties on this list, and they are the only properties currently eligible to be nominated by the U.S. The current List was compiled in 2008 after wide public notice and was based on a written application that interested property owners submitted. The Assistant Secretary can add properties to the List as part of an official process for making nominations, but there is no regular

schedule for doing so. Those interested in suggesting additions should contact NPS-OIA, and the suggestions will be considered when the List is revised.



### Timeline and Review Process for Nominations

The combined U.S. and international requirements necessitate a very long lead time for nominations, which almost always take several years at a minimum: Properties must be on the Tentative List for at least a year before nomination; the Assistant Secretary initiates a public process to choose nominations from the List; nominations are lengthy and detailed documents that may require additional research, peer review, multiple drafts, and public outreach; the documentation is reviewed by NPS-OIA and the the Federal Interagency Panel, and final drafts sent to UNESCO staff for technical review before the final decision is made to submit a nomination. Once a nomination has been submitted by the U.S., it takes approximately another 16 months before the World Heritage Committee considers the



nomination; this includes time for the independent technical advisory bodies to review the documentation and visit the site to evaluate it.

### Responsibilities of Different Parties

Although NPS-OIA will provide advice and assistance, the property owner has primary responsibility for preparing the nomination itself. A recent example for Papahānaumokuākea in Hawaii can be found at <http://www.papahānaumokuākea.gov/management/worldheritage.html>



### For more information:

The NPS-OIA web site has detailed information on the U.S. World Heritage program: <http://www.nps.gov/oia/topics/worldheritage/worldheritage.htm>

The World Heritage Centre of UNESCO has information on the global program, including the World Heritage criteria: <http://whc.unesco.org> as well as a Manual for Preparing Nominations: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/activities/643/>

The National Park Service Office of International Affairs is happy to answer questions about the World Heritage Program: Stephen Morris, Chief, NPS Office of International Affairs; [Stephen.Morris@nps.gov](mailto:Stephen.Morris@nps.gov); 202-354-1803



<http://www.nps.gov/oia>

